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121158Z May 05

ACTION DRL-00

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	EAP-00	EB-00
	UTED-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCE-00
	AC-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OES-00	OIC-00	OIG-00	OMB-00
	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	SS-00
	STR-00	TRSE-00	T-00	IIP-00	PMB-00	PRM-00	G-00
	SAS-00	/000W					

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FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1455
INFO AMEMBASSY HANOI PRIORITY
ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000493

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOC](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [VM](#) [RELFREE](#) [HUMANR](#)

SUBJECT: THE HUMAN RIGHTS CASE OF VIETNAMESE PASTOR THAN VAN
TRUONG

1. (SBU) Summary: Over the past two weeks ConGen HCMC has been investigating the case of Baptist Pastor Than Van Truong, who allegedly was involuntarily committed to a mental institution in Dong Nai province for the peaceful expression of his religious and political beliefs. Truong reportedly had a history of run-ins with Dong Nai provincial police over his involvement in the local house church movement. A series of letters in which Truong sought to evangelize senior Party and GVN leaders apparently catalyzed provincial authorities to commit him to the mental institution. A doctor who treated Truong told us that the Pastor was not violent, manic or depressed. While not explicit, our sense was that he implied that Truong perhaps should not be in a mental institution. The HCMC External Relations Office has promised to work quickly with Dong Nai authorities to provide clarification on this case. We are reserving judgment until we have a more comprehensive picture of the case: this is the first time we have dealt with allegations that Vietnamese authorities -- at any level -- are using incarceration in a mental institution as a way to punish religious or political activists. End Summary.

The Case of Pastor Truong

2. (SBU) On April 27 we met with Pastor Pham Toan Ai (strictly protect) to discuss the case of Baptist Pastor Than Van Truong, who reportedly was involuntarily committed to the Bien Hoa mental institution in Dong Nai province. Human Rights activists inside and outside Vietnam have alleged that Truong was committed as punishment for the peaceful expression of his religious and political beliefs. Pastor Ai, a colleague of Pastor Truong, heads a Baptist house church organization with 83 chapters and 8,000 members across Southern and Central Vietnam. On April 29, we spoke with Nguyen Thi Kim, the wife of Pastor Truong, whose reports confirmed and supplemented the history we received from Pastor Ai.

3. (SBU) Before becoming religious, Truong was a Party member and Army officer from the Northern Vietnam province of Bac Giang. Truong settled in Dong Nai province (near HCMC) where he worked for the Veteran's Association. In 2000, Truong reportedly became a Baptist minister and began evangelizing and organizing house churches in Dong Nai province. Local police began to harass the two churches that Pastor Truong served, seizing bibles and prayer materials and stopping services. Police also reportedly spread a rumor that Pastor Truong was teaching an "American religion" and would be arrested.

4. (SBU) In 2000, Truong started sending a series of letters to the Party General Secretary, the President and other senior GVN leaders in Hanoi as well as to provincial leaders urging them to abandon Marxism-Leninism and follow the precepts of the bible. In 2003 these letters landed Truong in hot water with local police, as copies were distributed in the province.

5. (SBU) On May 27, 2003, Truong was arrested and charged with "propagandizing against the government." He was kept in pre-trial detention for eight months, but was not charged. On June 20, 2004, Truong was released from prison and placed under administrative detention -- house arrest. The case against him remained open. Later in June, Truong violated his administrative detention order and was arrested and reimprisoned as he sought to return to Bac Giang, ostensibly to visit family. In July, the Pastor's wife was informed that he had been taken to a mental hospital for diagnosis. On September 30, 2004, the Ministry of Public Security in Dong Nai and the provincial prosecutor's office

administratively ordered that Truong be admitted to the criminal ward of the Bien Hoa mental hospital. Pastor Truong reportedly told his wife that the police had tricked him into signing an Order for Mandatory Medical Treatment, which committed him to the mental institution. (Note: On April 28, we contacted a leading HCMC defense attorney to discuss the case. According to our contact, the Vietnamese criminal code does not define specifically the procedures required to commit a person involuntarily to a mental hospital. However, authorities do have to document that the person has abnormal behavior, based on an evaluation conducted by competent provincial or central-level medical authorities. Procedurally, it makes no difference if the accused is in prison or under administrative detention. End Note.)

16. (SBU) Both Pastor Ai and Truong's wife maintained that Truong is not mentally ill. Neither knew the diagnosis under which Truong was admitted to the hospital. Ai said that he had visited Truong in the hospital, where Truong complained that the staff was medicating him against his will. Ai said he spoke with Truong's attending physician, who reportedly said that Truong was not mentally ill.

Discussions with the Truong's Doctor

17. (SBU) On May 9, we spoke with one of Pastor Truong's attending physicians (strictly protect) over the phone for an hour. (The doctor had backed out of an earlier commitment to meet with us in HCMC on May 7.) The doctor said that he had been working with Pastor Truong for eight months. He said that the Pastor was involuntarily committed to the hospital after a forensic medicine examination council determined that he was showing signs of a mental disorder. The doctor was informed orally by his supervisors that the Pastor was a paranoid schizophrenic suffering from paranoid delusions, but was not allowed to see the Pastor's medical file. Truong was being treated with an antipsychotic -- Haloperidol -- at a dosage of two to four tablets per day, 2 milligrams per tablet. He said that a comprehensive review of the patient's status has not been conducted; by law such a review only has to be conducted after a year.

18. (SBU) The doctor told us that the basis for hospitalization was that Pastor Truong showed signs of "delusions of grandeur," in particular by believing that he could evangelize Communist Party leaders. Such religious and quasi-political behavior is considered abnormal in Vietnam as a locally accredited pastor would never write to the GVN. Responding to our questions, the doctor told us that Pastor Truong has not exhibited any mania or depression. He is not violent, either to himself or to others. The letters that the pastor wrote to central leaders strongly lambasted Marxism-Leninism, but were not threatening. During our phone conversation the doctor demurred from responding categorically to our question as to whether or not he believed the pastor should be in the mental institution. In a subsequent text message conversation with us on May 10, we asked him again if he thought that it was justified that Truong was in a mental hospital. The doctor refused to answer directly, but appeared to imply that perhaps Truong should not be in a mental institution.

Official Follow-up

19. (SBU) On March 9 PolOff met with the HCMC External Relations Office to discuss the Truong case. We emphasized that the allegations are particularly troubling and smack of Soviet Gulag-style treatment of political and religious dissent. We had never heard of such a case in Vietnam before and hoped that the reports were not true. We emphasized that this case must be clarified quickly and thoroughly, lest the incident undercut or negate the goodwill that Vietnam is building in its overall handling of religious freedom issues. If the allegations stand up to scrutiny, even if only an isolated incident of atrocious judgment by local officials, the persons involved must shoulder responsibility for their actions. Our ERO counterparts told us that they understood the seriousness of the matter and promised to work with Dong Nai provincial authorities to give us a complete factual briefing soon. As of March 12, the ERO told us that they are working with Dong Nai officials, but have not yet received a full report on the case.

110. (SBU) Comment: Unless we hear a satisfactory reply from the ERO this week, we plan to travel to Dong Nai shortly to meet with relevant provincial and hospital officials. We also will try to meet Pastor Truong. Until we have a more complete picture we are reserving judgment: this is the first time we have dealt with allegations that mental institutions are being used to punish religious or political activists.

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